

SCREAMING HORROR OF THE Devil's Spawn

by JAMES FORRESTER

In a fraction of a second, a black pit yawned in front of me. Evil laughter filled my ears—as I was dragged to the brink!

DIANE LAY ON the floor writing in a series of violent convulsions. Her usually lovely face was contorted into an evil, feral mask. A stream of foul curses and obscene blasphemies poured from her foam-flecked lips in a staccato-like scream. Her thin, silk gown had been torn to shreds and the ragged tatters were parted to expose the soft fullness of her white body. Her hands seemed to be moving of their own volition, fingers and her fingernails, tearing and raking at her shoulders, throat and heaving, bare breasts. I stared down at her in helpless horror. My brain reeled and my blood froze as I watched this final, utter degradation of the woman I loved!

I made a sudden move toward her; Conrad Lorentz grasped my shoulder and pulled me back.



"It would be extremely dangerous to touch her," he murmured in his sneering voice. "It will be an hour—perhaps two—before she will return to what you would call a normal state . . ."

"You rotten bastard!" I snarled. "I ought to kill you, Lorentz . . ."

"But you won't," he rasped. "You won't do a thing."

I was silent. He was absolutely right. I wouldn't do anything to him. I could not—I dared not. Lorentz spoke again.

"Perhaps you won't be so ready to scoff at us from now on, Mr. Forrester," he leered. "You will not be so quick to call us crack-pots and phonies in the future—will you?"

"No," I groaned, utterly defeated. "You win, Lorentz—all around . . ."

"We'd better leave Miss Simmons alone for the time being," he said. "She's really enjoying herself. An outsider like you can't possibly imagine what wonderful images and visions she's having. But enough of that. Come along with me . . ."

I followed him like a helpless idiot. Lorentz led me into his private office—a room draped with dark velvet hangings and decorated with all the trappings and paraphernalia one would expect to find in the office of a cult-leader. There were ugly, even hideous idols on pedestals, cases filled with books on magic and witchcraft, occult and astrological symbols everywhere in the room. The air was heavy with the stink of some heavy, cloying incense which rose in clouds from a smoldering brazier by the door.

"Sit down," Conrad Lorentz said. It was an order rather than an invitation. "I think you'd better wait in here—where I can keep an eye on you."

I obeyed. There was nothing else I could do. Whatever happened afterwards, right now my main obsession was to get Diane out of there—and to do that, I would have to play along with Conrad Lorentz, much as I loathed and detested the man.

I'd had nothing but scoffing contempt for him at first—for him, for the dizzy "high priests and priestesses," and for the other half-baked followers of his weird cult.

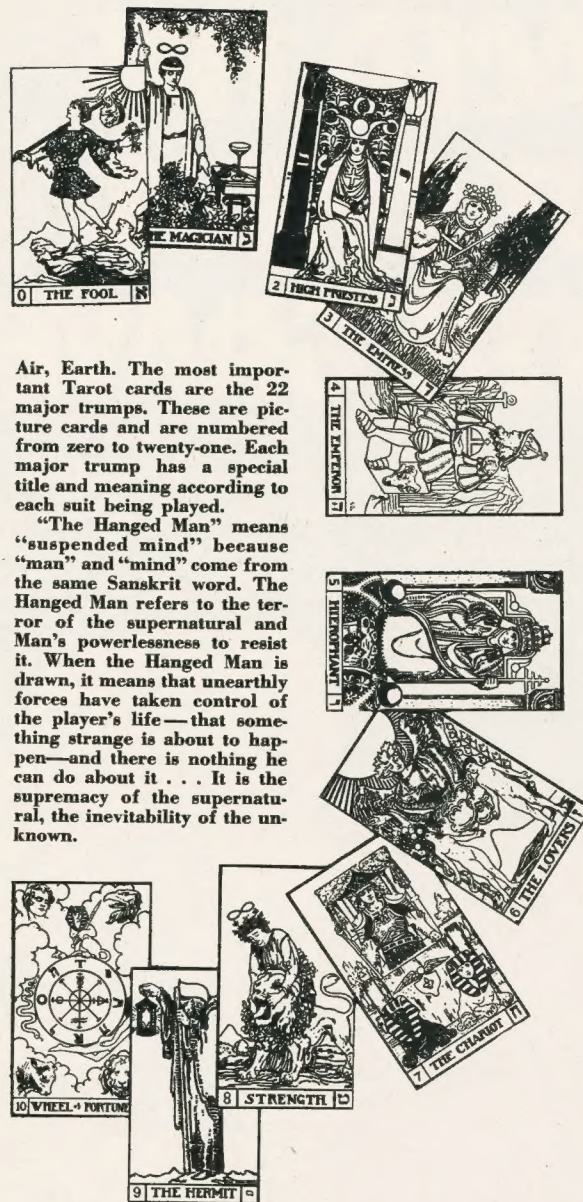
I had considered Conrad Lorentz a fake and a fraud—a money-hungry voluptuary, a satyr who used his cult as nothing but a source of profit and orgiastic pleasure.



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Air, Earth. The most important Tarot cards are the 22 major trumps. These are picture cards and are numbered from zero to twenty-one. Each major trump has a special title and meaning according to each suit being played.

"The Hanged Man" means "suspended mind" because "man" and "mind" come from the same Sanskrit word. The Hanged Man refers to the terror of the supernatural and Man's powerlessness to resist it. When the Hanged Man is drawn, it means that unearthly forces have taken control of the player's life—that something strange is about to happen—and there is nothing he can do about it . . . It is the supremacy of the supernatural, the inevitability of the unknown.

sure. I hadn't changed my mind about any of that—but I had been forced to admit that the man did have some strange power. I'd seen enough evidence of that in the form of phenomena I could not possibly explain.

I knew that both Diane and I were powerless against Lorentz. Who would listen to me if I complained? And, even if someone would listen, I—God help me—was terrified of what Lorentz could do to both of us in revenge!

"Well, Forrester, what do you intend doing now?" the cultist asked when he'd seated himself behind the ornately-carved Chinese table he used as a desk. He was completely at his ease, absolutely sure of himself.

"I want to take Diane home," I said, feeling a cold shudder rip along my spine. "I want to get her away from here."

"You'll be free to do so, as soon as she 'comes back,'" Lorentz smirked. "She's rather far away at present—in a cataleptic state about which you understand nothing. You may take her anywhere you wish after she returns to what you'd call a 'normal' state. I warn you, though, that she'll want to come back—that she'll insist on coming back to us afterwards . . ."

"I'll risk that!" I snapped. Lorentz only chuckled. I changed my tactics. "Look," I began, pleading with him, "why don't you break this hypnotic spell or whatever you use on your vic—on your followers—that you have on Diane. I'll pay you . . ."

Lorentz waved off that one with an impatient gesture of contempt.

"Diane Simmons has more money than you do, Forrester," he declared coldly. "Besides, she is a very attractive young woman. I want her—and I intend having her. I also intend getting as much of her money as possible."

"That's outright robbery! You could be sent to prison," I told him. "You could be . . ."

"Oh, stop!" he snorted, cutting me off in mid-sentence. "I've been operating the Circle of Selena for nearly fifteen years. I've never even been arrested. The few people who have tried to make trouble for me have regretted it."

I was sick at heart, revolted. I didn't have the slightest doubt that everything he said was true. Conrad Lorentz had been operating in Southern California for a long time. His cult, "The Circle of Selena" had (Continued on page 46)

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DON FILIPE read somewhere that all great generals liked to take solitary walks before retiring for the night. Not wishing to be left out, he cultivated the habit. He would leave through a door in the garden wall, amble for a mile or two, then return to the house by another route. He found it relaxing after the day's heavy responsibilities.

Filipe was glad this day was over. It had been an especially trying one. His men simply refused to listen to him. There were even rumors that some of his troops had left him to join that idiot Bolivar's men in the next county. "The stupid fools," he muttered through clenched teeth. "They've got to listen to me, to ME! I don't care about their piddling freedom—*perdida de tiempo*—waste of time. I'm their master, not the government, not the church, not the military. My word is law!"

He viciously decapitated a row of chrysanthemums with his walking stick and pretended they were his enemies. Then he left the confines of the walled garden and began his walk around the estate.

About two miles from the house, he quickly picked up his ears. Filipe thought he heard a noise. There—it happened again. Just over the side of that low hill, near Vandra's house.

He strode purposefully toward it—then stopped dead in his tracks.

"AAGH!" he screamed—but too late. Things, hundreds of things grabbed him. He struggled furiously but bony arms held like steel grips. The harder he tried to free himself, the stronger they became. And the smell of decaying flesh made him want to vomit.

"Help—for God's sake! Help me, Vandra!"

Like a queen of ancient times, Vandra walked out on the porch. But it was a different Vandra. No longer stooped and toothless, she stood proud, tall, mightier than life. As she walked towards him, the things dropped away. Filipe collapsed in front of her, weeping wildly. He covered his eyes from the dreadful sight in front of him. "Vandra," he sobbed.

She stood over him, then turned away. "You want to command men—so be it. Take these who have already died so that the living need not perish by your folly. Lead them on to victory, my son." She walked away.

The un-dead again approached cowering Filipe. He screamed with

terror as he felt icy death reach out and lift him bodily from the ground. His heart beat faster and faster until everything in sight became too clear, too detailed. Suddenly an agonizing pain broke in his chest and he felt blood in his mouth, eyes, ears. He gasped as shooting fire blinded him—the instant before he died of fright!

The things began to carry him to their lair. But they stopped and began to waver, sway, then finally collapse into a pile of foul-smelling shreds of flesh and clothing hanging wildly to dull bone.

Vandra clutched the railing of her porch as dry sobs wracked her ancient shoulders. The irony, the bitterness overwhelmed her. She had failed to accomplish her vengeance on the enemies of her family's ancestors. And to do it, she had to sacrifice that which she had loved the most. Starlight gilded the sparse teardrops on her withered cheeks. She moaned softly, stooped, then fell. And in her fall, joined her people.

THE END

SCREAMING HORROR

(Continued from page 29)

a sizable membership—and like most of the other odd-ball, quack religions in that paradise for phony "isms," it was a prosperous business proposition.

"I can't be touched," Lorentz went on. "I even have a license."

I KNEW THIS. I'd gone down to Room One at the Los Angeles City Hall weeks before. There, in the License and Sales Tax Division of the City Clerk's office, employees had dug through their records for me. They came up with the information that the Circle of Selena had been duly licensed to do business as a "Religious Group" in the city of Los Angeles, as provided in the Municipal Code!

"We've issued thousands of licenses just like it," a bored clerk told me. "You can get one yourself, if you want—for twelve dollars..."

The police had been unable to help me.

"Our hands are tied—unless someone makes a formal complaint," a veteran detective informed me. "There are a lot of these cults we'd like to move against—but we can't do a thing until we have definite evidence of a crime."

Conrad Lorentz stood up. "I've got other things to do," he announced. "You can stay here—and sit quietly or pace the floor or whatever else you feel like doing at the

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moment. I'll come back after you when I think that Diane is ready to leave . . ."

The door closed behind him. I stared blankly at the draped walls. It was incredible that such things could be happening in the heart of a great American city—in 1958—yet they were happening.

Diane Simmons, my fiancé, lay on the floor in a nearby room, gripped by a wild frenzy. To my stunned horror, I had discovered that there actually were witches, sorcerers and warlocks in the 20th Century!

Fantastic? Unbelievable?

I would have thought so too—six months ago. I would have laughed in the face of anyone who even suggested that there was any real basis of fact in the stories and legends told about magic and witchcraft.

Yeah, I, Jim Forrester, 27, a sensible, fairly level-headed shop foreman, had been forced to admit the existence of dark, evil forces against which common sense and even the theories of modern science offered no defense!

Diane and I had been going together for nearly two years—and we'd been engaged for almost ten months. I'd always been good-naturedly tolerant about her interest in such things as astrology, palm-reading and seances. I'd allowed her to drag me along to all sorts of nutty fortune-tellers and lectures.

All the screwball mumbo-jumbo was just so much rot to me, but I figured that Diane was only 22 and that she was going through a stage she'd eventually get over. Then, in May, 1958, one of her maiden aunts died and left her some money—about \$20,000. That helped turn Diane's interest in the occult into a full-time occupation. She quit her job as a secretary for a Wilshire Boulevard advertising agency and spent just about every moment reading books and magazines about astrology, psychic phenomena and that sort of stuff.

It was in September that she first heard about the Circle of Selena. I had picked her up at her apartment one evening. We were going out to dinner and the movies, but she changed all that.

"I've just been told about the most wonderful group!" she bubbled enthusiastically. I groaned inwardly.

"It's quite famous and I'm surprised I hadn't heard about it before," she went on. "I understand that it's headed by a man named Conrad Lorentz. Some of the girls I know say that he's simply marvelous—he has real occult powers . . ."

"Oh, nuts!" I griped. "What does this one do—levitate tables or make ghosts appear in a dark room?"

We went to the "Circle's" weekly meeting—which was being held that night. The cult had its headquarters in a huge house up in the Hollywood Hills—up above Beechwood Drive in what used to be called "Hollywood-land" before the war.

I didn't like Lorentz from the first moment I saw him and I didn't like the setup he had, either. As we came in, Lorentz stared at Diane as if she was naked—and it was obvious that he liked what he saw as he mentally undressed her with his hot eyes.

The groups assembled formed the usual Hollywood cult pattern. There were some "Big People" present—you know, movie directors and one or two second-string actors. There were also the usual bored wives, a few nances, some goofy-looking men and a sprinkling of unattached, attractive girls.

The "ritual" followed the medieval "Tarot Cult" symbolism. As far as I could tell, it had to do with the "mystic" symbols represented on "Tarot" or old-fashioned fortune-telling cards. These originated centuries ago in Europe and are all mixed up with occultism and sorcery.

There were heavy sexual overtones to every part of the ritual. I gathered pretty quickly that there were other, less public meetings of the group during which there was less talk and ritual—and a lot more playing around.

The whole deal gave me the willies. There was something eerie—unclean—about the Circle of Selena. Diane, however, was fascinated by the outfit and by its leader.

"I've got to go there more often," she told me. "I feel that I'll really be able to enter the arcana of the forbidden through the Circle of Selena." Di talked like that.

WE WENT TO TWO MORE meetings together. Then Diane broke a few dates. I couldn't understand it and I pinned her down.

"I'm attending Conrad Lorentz's special classes," she confessed. "He says I am naturally adept—that I was born with occult powers—and he wants to initiate me into the Inner Temple . . ."

I argued and got nowhere. Di explained that there were several other "apprentice initiates" studying with Lorentz. That made me feel a little better—but not much.

I was worried, and so I decided to do some checking. That's when I went to City Hall and to the Police. I had a friend of mine who was a reporter on a Los Angeles daily search his paper's morgue. He came up with a little information but it didn't tell me much. There were indications that Lorentz had been mixed up in several shady affairs—but there had been no proof.

I tried another angle. I went to libraries and bookstores. I gathered up everything I could find on witchcraft, black magic, sorcery and the occult. I read until my eyes were ready to drop out of my skull.

What knocked me for a loop was the fact that many doctors and scientists actually admit there are people with supernatural powers. They openly acknowledge not only

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the possibility—but the probability—that witches, magicians and sorcerers exist!

No less an authority than Dr. Edward Podolsky, M.D., psychiatrist at the New York Medical College, claims that "black magic is taught in secret schools at both Oxford and Cambridge" in England!

Dr. Angold Bader, of Chicago, who has made a lifetime study of "black magic" in the United States says that there are at least 2,500 "sorcerers" in the country—today.

"One may be skeptical and a doubter," says Dr. Bader, "but the indisputable fact remains that many of these 'black magicians' perform acts and produce phenomena which cannot be explained by science. It is not too far-fetched to assume that these 'black magicians' are quite capable of committing heinous crimes, even murders . . ."

As for the dangers facing those who dabble in the occult—scientists warn of them in no uncertain terms. In regard to black magic Dr. Edward Podolsky says, "These practices are an open door to insanity."

There was more, much more. I told Diane all about what I'd read and begged her to break away from Lorentz and his cult. She told me to mind my own business. But *she* was my business.

The only thing left to do was to go to the meetings with her. Lorentz of course quickly realized that I was antagonistic toward him and his group. I, in turn, sensed that his interest in Diane was far from that of a religious leader toward a disciple.

He took the initiative. He invited us both to attend a "Sabbat" being held the following Friday night. I tried to say no, but Di was enthusiastically insistent. She had made up her mind to take part—and I decided that I might as well go along, even though I had a premonition that something was about to happen.

The rites began at eleven o'clock on Friday night. We arrived about fifteen minutes early and were ushered into what Lorentz called his "Temple of Tarot." Occult symbols and pentagrams decorated the dimly-lit walls. Some 12 or 14 people were already there.

Diane was breathing hard as she sat next to me. A few moments later the lights went out. A single, red spotlight blazed down from the ceiling and illuminated a garish altar. Lorentz—clad in the flowing robes of a warlock—stood there. He uttered a long incantation.

Two half-dressed women—I recognized them as girls I'd seen at previous meetings—lighted braziers. They flung some powder into the flames. A heavy, yellow, incense-laden mist spread through the room and hung motionless in the air.

"Spirits of darkness," Lorentz called out, "hear me and come forth."

this mumbo-jumbo, the ritual becoming more suggestive and obscene. Lorentz and his two "high-priestesses" disported themselves on the stage-like "sanctuary" while the audience grunted and gasped. It looked like third-rate burlesque to me.

"We shall drink of the elixir of the spirit of darkness!" Lorentz said. The two half-naked women brought large brass cups. They were passed from hand to hand. Each person drank. I tried to fake it, but Diane made me take two full swallows of the stuff before I passed it on. It tasted like cheap wine.

Meanwhile Lorentz was leading the congregation in slow sensuous chants. They went on and on. I began to get drowsy. My eyes stayed open, but I felt as though I was falling asleep. I tried to shake myself awake. I couldn't. I couldn't even move!

THE ROOM SEEMED to be closing in around me. Dark shadows moved and swayed. I felt a presence—the presence of a force, a spirit, a devil, call it what you will. It was near me and all around me.

Did I imagine it, or was there really someone or something else standing alongside of Lorentz? Everything blurred and grew hazy.

"Come forward, Diane Simmons—and be initiated."

I was aware that Diane was standing up—moving to the altar. I wanted to grab her, to stop here, but I couldn't move.

She stood in front of Conrad Lorentz. His face had changed completely—diabolical, inhuman—almost alive. Lorentz gestured at her. She repeated some words after him.

He reached out and touched her. She remained immobile. Impotent rage swept over me. He reached around her shoulders and slowly drew her to him . . .

I must have been unconscious. Either some hypnotic power or a drug placed in the wine I had drunk or some other thing of which I was unaware had sent me into a comatose state of suspended animation.

When I came out of it, it was dawn. I was lying on a couch and Lorentz—now wearing a business suit—stood over me. He was smiling sardonically. I tried to sit up.

"It's no use trying that," he murmured. "You are still under my influence, my friend."

To prove it, he made me see ghastly images, visions straight out of hell. He himself seemed to vanish and reappear at will. Only when my mind was completely exhausted did he stop.

"Now I can show you your fiancé," he suddenly announced. He took me into the room where Diane lay on the floor. She was in a condition that witch-burners called "possessed by devils." Someone had put a dressing gown on her. She'd torn and ripped that to ribbons. She

mouthed blasphemous and foul words and sentences.

"Diane has quite an affinity for the darker forces," the cult leader murmured. "She really behaved like a witch of old last night. It's a pity you didn't see what she did—and with whom . . ."

Then he told me. My belly knotted and churned. I wanted to kill him but my body seemed to be drained of any power to act. Diane—my fiancé—had plumbed the depths of degradation and depravity. And I knew that Lorentz was telling the truth.

"If you've seen enough, you can come to my office," he concluded.

I went with him meekly. I went into his office and I sat there, staring blankly at the walls until he returned.

"Your fiancé is ready for you—a little tired, but otherwise quite unharmed," he announced.

Diane stared at my face as though she barely recognized me. I led her out to the car. She was wearing the same clothes she had when we'd arrived the night before. Most of the scratches she'd inflicted on herself were hidden.

"Di, I want to . . ." I began shakily when we were in the car.

"Take me home," she muttered. "I don't want to talk now."

We drove down Beechwood Drive. It was a clear day and I could see the vast carpet-panorama of Los Angeles spread out below us. It no longer appeared real—there was no reality. I pulled up in front of Diane's apartment building.

"Diane, let's sit down and talk . . ." I tried again.

"There's nothing to say," she replied icily. "I don't want to see you again."

"But—we're going to be married." A crazy, terrifying smile—like that of a well-fed leopard—curled her lips. The lids of her eyes closed half-way.

"We can't get married, Jim," she purred contentedly. "I was married last night—on the other side."

"Di! For God's sake!"

"Oh, I'm not through with you yet—not really," Diane drawled. "I'll want you later—after I've gained more knowledge and experience of the dark arts."

"What?"

"Yes, Jim. I will want you—to use you. I don't know when that will be, but when I'm ready I'll send for you. And you'll be waiting . . ."

She got out of the car without another word, without even looking back, and went into her solid brick steel and mortar apartment house.

No. I haven't tried to contact her since. I want to forget all about her—and all about Conrad Lorentz and his Tarot Cult—his "Circle of Selena."

I've tried to get it all out of my mind—but I can't. I know that I'm just marking time, just waiting.

And I'm scared . . .

THE END



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